DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 321 158 CE 056 070

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TITLE	Helping At-Risk Youth Make the School-to-Work Transition. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, Ohio.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-CE-90-101
PUB DATE	90
CONTRACT	RI88062005
NOTE	3p.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Agency Cooperation; *Articulation (Education); *Coordination; *Delivery Systems; Disadvantaged Youth; *Education Work Relationship; Employment Potential; *High Risk Students; Job Skills; Secondary Education
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

School-to-work transition services are intended to help youth develop the skills and attitudes they need to find and keep employment, maintain a meaningful adult life-style, and develop positive social interactions. Eligibility for such services has now been broadened beyond disabled students to include students with economic or educational disadvantages or limited English proficiency. Barriers to effective delivery of transition services are: (1) lack of career exploration programs in middle schools; (2) lack of interagency coordination; (3) lack of case managers; (4) limited parental involvement; and (5) absence of a computerized management information system. Four types of models for effective delivery include: curriculum content models; instructional stages models; supportive services models; and articulation and communication models. Successful transition service practices depend upon: (1) the availability and identification of a wide array of community services; (2) systematic procedures for prescribing appropriate services, such as individualized plans, case management, transition assistance centers, and parent resource centers; (3) articulation between service providers, within single agencies or institutions and between multiple agencies or institutions; and (4) systematic tracking of information regarding the availability, cost, and evaluation of services. (SK)

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ERIC DIGEST No. 101

EDO-CE-90-101

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

HELPING AT-RISK YOUTH MAKE THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION

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The changing demographics of the U.S. work force mean that programs and services to help youth make a successful transition from school to work will be increasingly needed throughout this decade. Such services are necessary if women, minorities, and immigrants are to make up the predicted 80 percent of new workers by the year 2000, and if the United States is to be successful in an increasingly competitive world marketplace.

This ERIC Digest is based on Feichtner (1989), a synthesis of research on school-to-work transition. The digest describes transition services and the youth who need them, lists programmatic barriers to effective delivery of services, describes models for service delivery, and discusses successful practices.

Services and At-Risk Youth

School-to-work transition services are intended to help youth develop the skills and attitudes they need to find and keep employment, to obtain and maintain a meaningful adult lifestyle, and to develop positive social interactions. The most accepted outcome measure of success for transition service programs is the eventual employment of the at-risk youth. A wide array of services may be necessary, including legal help, housing services, health care, financial aid, employment assistance, career guidance, basic skills education, occupational training, language assistance, transportation, and child care.

The concept of providing school-to-work transition services originated in an attempt to bridge the gap between the secondary school's protective environment and adult life, including employment, for disabled students. Service eligibility has now been broadened to include students with economic or educational disadvantages and youth who are not proficient in English. Other groups who may need special transition services include teenage parents, displaced homemakers, displaced workers, and incarcerated youth and adults.

Transition services have been promoted and shaped by federal legislation. Feichtner cites 12 such laws and 4 policy initiatives and priorities, including the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Rehabilitation Act, Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act, and Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). The fact that services are provided under the auspices of multiple laws, agencies, guidelines, and policies has caused some problems.

Barriers

Feichtner identifies programmatic (as opposed to societal) barriers to the effective delivery of transition services to at-risk youth. The most significant of these barriers is the lack of a mandated systematic process for delivering the services. Other barriers are--

- Lack of coordination between agencies, which often results in competitive and duplicative efforts
- Confusion among parents and youths about what programs and services are available
- Limited use of parents as resources
- Lack of case managers for secondary students with disadvantages or limited English proficiency
- Lack of career exploration programs in middle schools
- Absence of a computerized information management system to control the vast amount of information needed for transition decision making and evaluation

Existing Models

Four types of models describe aspects of an effective service delivery system.

Curriculum Content Models

Programs designed around these models attempt to provide the content knowledge and basic, interpersonal, social, employability, and occupational skills the youths need to become employable.

Instructional Stages Models

Programs based on these models consider the transition from school to work as a developmental process that occurs in four stages: career awareness, exploration, preparation, and implementation. Because these models view transition as a lifelong process made continuous by shifting job requirements and work patterns, they incorporate multiple transition points--not just the one after secondary school.

Supportive Services Models

These programs offer services intended to overcome disadvantages--medical treatment, transportation, child care, financial assistance, equipment purchase, diagnosis, evaluation, counseling, assessment, language assistance, recreation, protection, and job placement.

Articulation and Communication Models

These models focus on coordination among the many transition-related organizations, including federal agencies that identify needed legislation and develop the regulations and guidelines for implementing it, state agencies that initiate and facilitate collaboration, and local agencies that implement the collaboration that results in successful transition.

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Successful Practices

Successful transition service practices include (1) the availability and identification of a wide array of community services; (2) systematic procedures for prescribing appropriate services; (3) articulation between those services; and (4) systematic tracking of information regarding the availability, cost, and evaluation of services.

Array of Services

Because the needs of at-risk youth are so diverse, program success depends largely on having available and having identified a variety of services to meet those needs.

Systematic Procedures

Systematic procedures for prescribing appropriate services are necessary because the prescriptions must reflect the complicated needs and options of individual youths. Several techniques are often involved in systematic procedures, including individualized plans, case managers, transition planning guides, transition assistance centers, and parent resource centers.

Transition is facilitated through the use of an Individualized Education Plan, Individualized Training Plan, or Individualized Vocational Education Plan. Such plans typically list the abilities, skills, interests, aptitudes, achievements, and knowledge of the student as they relate to various occupational goals. Each plan is developed by a team that includes parents. The team is headed by a case manager if the youth is a disabled secondary student. Out-of-school youth who receive bilingual vocational training or JTPA services may also have a case manager. However, there are no formalized case managers identified for secondary students with disadvantages or limited English proficiency.

Some states have published transition planning guides that describe in detail the transition services that are available and the process through which they can be obtained. Some guides provide space in which individuals can document the process as it occurs.

Articulation of Services

Successful programs are skillful at articulating their services to avoid duplication and omission. They link services at all levels so that students can move from one course, program, or service to another--between or within agencies. Successful articulation depends on linkages between the people who provide services at the various agencies. The linkages can be both within single agencies or institutions and between multiple agencies or institutions.

State-level interagency agreements are one mechanism that Feichtner cites as useful in facilitating collaboration between agencies. Examples are--

- The Texas Interagency Agreement for the Provision of Statewide Transition Services, in which three state agencies agreed to develop jointly a strategic plan designating personnel, funds, timelines, and evaluation criteria for services; develop a coordinated process for screening, diagnosis, and program development; and implement a plan for cost-sharing, joint funding, and inservice training.
- The California Compact, under which California employers, two state departments, and a federal department worked to establish long-term public-private partnerships to help disadvantaged youth. Among the Compact's goals are to provide motivation, support, and information necessary for students to stay in school; and to provide financial aid, information, and scholarships for postsecondary education.
- The Boston Compact, in which the city school department, the business community, higher education institutions, and the JTPA private industry council work to improve the educational performance and opportunities of disadvantaged students. Among the goals are increasing school attendance by 5 percent, expanding an existing work-study program from 3 to 6 of the city's 17 high schools, increasing postsecondary enrollment by 25 percent, and providing career counseling, screening, and employment referral.

Feichtner cites four principles for interagency collaboration that resulted from the work of 35 representatives of education, county government, adult services providers, employers, and parents in Montgomery County, Maryland:

- Establish a common vocabulary for describing the programs, services, and procedures so each member understands the entire transition process
- Identify each organization's area of expertise, the resources each will contribute, and what each will get out of the arrangement
- Have each organization indicate how clients can gain access to its services and what treatment clients can expect
- Design service collaboration to alleviate rather than impose responsibilities

A good example of intra-agency cooperation is the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services at Harnell College in California. The program was designed to recruit, retrain, graduate, and/or facilitate transfer of disadvantaged and minority students. It provides intensive assistance in admissions, registration, financial aid, curriculum planning, tutoring, counseling (including peer counseling), and university transfer.

Systematic Tracking of Information

A database management system to coordinate information about students' needs and to match those needs with available programs and services is needed to keep the delivery of transition services from becoming fragmented and ineffective. Feichtner points out that such a system can also be used for cost-benefit analysis and for conducting basic research on the transition process itself.

REFERENCES

This ERIC Digest is based on the following publication:

Feichtner, Sheila H. *School-to-Work Transition for At-Risk Youth*. Information Series no. 339. Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Center on Education and Training for Employment, The Ohio State University, 1989. (ERIC No. ED 315 666).

This ERIC Digest was developed in 1990 by Cheryl Meredith Lowry with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education under Contract No. RI88062005. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of OERI or the Department of Education. Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced.

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